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**We must
no longer
look for
the dead in
the tomb**

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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Inquiring Words

The symbolic language of the crucifixion is the death of the old paradigm; resurrection is a leap into a whole new way of thinking.

— Deepak Chopra

GA Motions

Snoopers and climate on the bill

Climate Change, the Syrian War and the 'Snoopers' Charter' are the subjects of motions before the General Assembly when it meets next week in Birmingham.

The Foy Society, along with the Penal Affairs panel propose a motion that calls on the government to change the 'Investigatory Powers Bill', currently before Parliament. The motion, number three, calls on the government to seek a judge's approval prior to instituting surveillance, to use targeted, rather than blanket surveillance methods, and not to compel service providers to retain data on all of their customers.

Motion number four, proposed by Golders Green Unitarians expresses concern for the 250,000 Syrians who have died in the war and for the 10 million who have been displaced by the violence. It asks that individual Unitarians support the Clara Barton Red Cross Interfaith Emergency Appeal for aid to the victims.

A new motion – motion seven – is the amalgamation of two proposed motions on the environment. Motion five, from Norcliffe Chapel, Styal and motion six from 12 full members of the General Assembly have been folded into motion seven. That motion seeks that Unitarian individuals and congregations become aware of their carbon footprints and act to reduce them by lessening energy consumption and making environmentally friendly choices in travel and diet. It also asks that Unitarians take collective action along with other organisations, to insist that cuts of gas emission levels be made quickly.

The Executive Committee has also proposed that the General Assembly change its legal status to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation which, according to the Background Papers is a new structure that 'could provide some of the benefits of being a company, but without some of the burdens.' A feature of a CIO is that trustees will be personally safeguarded from the charity's financial liabilities.

Another motion proposed by the Executive Committee will institute term limits for representatives on the committee. If the motion is approved, Executive Committee members may serve a maximum of eight years and will be required to come off the committee for at least a year before seeking office again.

For background information on the motions and to see all the signatories go to: <http://bit.ly/1Rm8wa4>

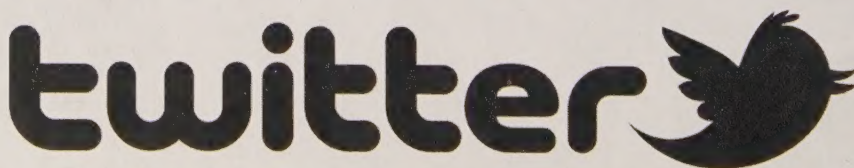
For the text of the motions, see: <http://bit.ly/255Lf08>

The new wording of motion seven is here: <http://bit.ly/1TQcOXz>

— MC Burns

Correction

There was a mistake in the headline of the obituary for Stanley Bateman, published in the 27 February Inquirer. Stanley was an honorary member of the London District (LDPA), not the General Assembly.



Follow @The__Inquirer (two underscores) on Twitter. A little shot of Unitarian news and faith in 140 characters. <https://twitter.com/>

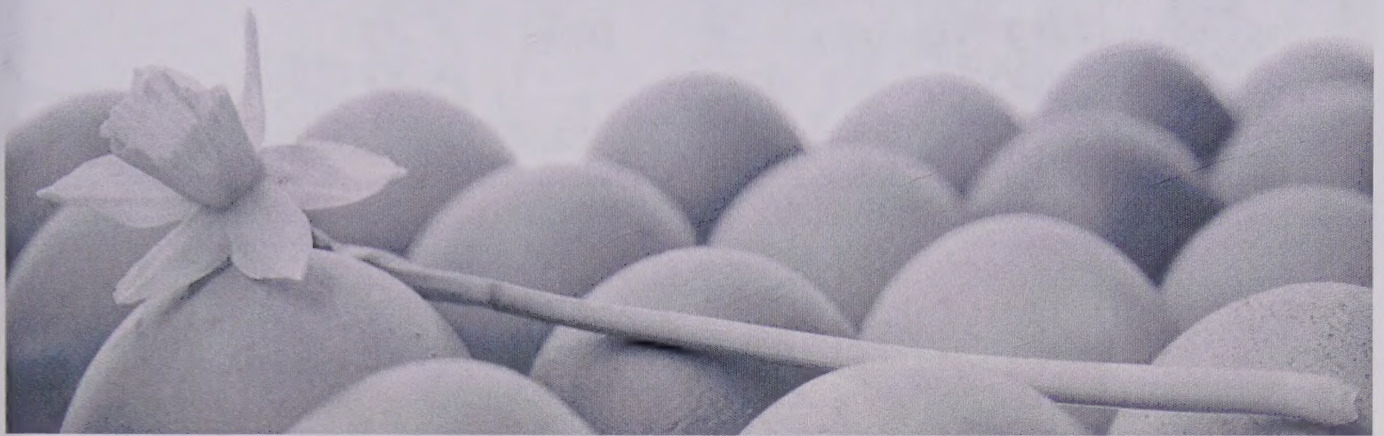


Photo by Anna Moderska

Easter: A time to love and embrace life

By Nicky Jenkins

Easter is not just Sunday. It is a mystical expression of life, which must include both Easter Friday and Saturday. Unitarians hold a range of different ideas about the person of Jesus and why he is or isn't important to us.

Good Friday, the gospel stories tell us, was the day of the crucifixion. It was a day of anguish, of mourning, of loss. Not only had the disciples and friends of Jesus lost a man who was so special and loved, but they had lost their dream of a leader who would take them into the new Kingdom, casting aside the oppression of the invaders and gentiles, who did not follow their God or their ways in their own lands.

It's all there. The pleas to God. 'Please take this away from me', in the Garden of Gethsemane; the physical pain of Jesus, the heavy burden of his cross, coming so soon after his tumultuous welcome and then his betrayal by the same people. And then, waiting to die. Facing the inevitable. A terrible event. The sorrow of his mother standing for the sorrow of all mothers who watch their sons making dangerous choices of their own free will, knowing they cannot protect them forever, and having to let them go knowing the pain they will suffer at their loss.

Then Easter Saturday – which in the gospel stories is the Sabbath. And because it was the Sabbath, the body had to be quickly dealt with before sundown on the Friday night. On the Sabbath, no work could be done. So they waited, they waited and they waited. When someone dies there is much to do and some of us want desperately to keep going, keep busy so we don't have to remember. But inevitably there is the time of waiting, waiting for arrangements to be made. Waiting outside of time, where everything else is going on as usual and you are an observer dissociated from life, lapped in the sorrow and shock of mourning.

So it wasn't until the third day, the Sunday after the Sabbath was finished that they came once more to the tomb to complete the funerary rituals. It was the women who came, bringing the ointments and perfumes, so that they could perform these last intimate and caring tasks for their beloved leader and teacher.

And they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. A man dressed in white tells them, 'He has been raised. He

is not here'. There comes a time when we must no longer look for the dead in the tomb. That is not where they are. The man tells them to inform the disciples that Jesus has gone to Galilee, there they will see him. Galilee is their homeland. It is by returning from the seat of political power and the Temple in Jerusalem that they will find him again.

This news terrifies the women who fled and told no one in the original first version of the story. So the idea that the laws of nature could be overturned was not, at first, received with unbounded joy. The women did not accept this seemingly magical pronouncement. They were 'seized with terror and amazement' words which reflect those used when telling the story of Jesus. Amazement surrounds his healing of lepers, the paralysed and those possessed of demons. They were afraid when the man was healed of unclean spirits and asked him to leave the area. They were terrified when he walked on water.

So the power of Life in this man was so great that it terrified and amazed.

We too are so afraid, so much bound up with the ways of man that the ways of God, of Life and of Love often terrify us. It is only by stepping through this terror that we can learn to trust life. And we need to do this every day, every hour and every moment. This following of the way of life and love is not easy. We need to fight our fear, overcome our cynical and rational disbelief, and simply trust. And the more we do it the more we come to understand and to embrace this life-giving approach.

The message of Jesus to love and embrace life to the full was counter-cultural and it still is today. What he said frightened people because he asked them to give up their wealth, their families and possessions to follow him. It's frightening to contemplate giving up your familiar approach to getting on, being successful in life, and it's only when you overcome the fear that you experience the rewards of a fulfilled life. But this is not a once-and-for-all decision. You have to keep doing it and then you will move from your stultifying Easter Saturday into the fullness of your Easter Sundays over and over again.

This Easter Sunday I say to you: Choose Life.

The Rev Nicky Jenkins is minister at Chorlton.

Volunteers return to Calais to help



Unitarians and other volunteers called themselves 'Team Calais'. All photos provided by Elizabeth Hornby

By Elizabeth Hornby

Our return trip to the Jungle at Calais was another emotional roller-coaster; from the moment we set out from Dorset to the moment we fell into our beds on our return was an adventure. Fourteen volunteers including John Harley and Joey Clarkson from our original trip went to Calais at the beginning of January to bring supplies and money to the kitchens as well as many blankets and a host of musical instruments. This new team of amazing people nicknamed *Team Calais* for the duration were from every decade from teens to 70s. We took two 4x4 vehicles and a large van and we stayed at the large hostel in Calais. All 200+ staying at the hostel were volunteering at the Jungle or Dunkirk every day. We met nurses, trainee doctors, students from all over Europe and even a few from further afield.

Before we left Bridport people really rallied, in the last day or two before we left we were handed many donations of money and things we had asked for. Families gave their Christmas gift money, and the whole chapel community and wider community of Bridport generally gave whatever they could. It was extremely humbling. So arriving for our first day of volunteering at the Warehouse in Calais, I found the kitchen manager and gave her our donation of over €1200, naturally she was delighted; It can feed 2000 people for a week. As I walked back to the group, the other kitchen manager who started this venture with chef friends from London came up for a big hug and a photo.



A selfie with the kitchen crew by Elizabeth Hornby

Also, turning up with many ready hands to peel and chop, wash and cook was very well received mid-week, they have a dip of volunteers available Monday to Friday (So this is a great time to go, folks!)

It is easy to volunteer at the warehouse. People are busy and there is plenty there that anyone can do. It is vital work and I would encourage anyone thinking of coming out to help to go through the warehouse first. Arrive, introduce yourself and get put to work! The morale is high, music is on and people are VERY friendly and helpful. The kitchen at the Warehouse feeds 2000 people a day and on top of that distributes raw food daily each morning to the Jungle and Dunkirk kitchens on site so that communities can cook for themselves.

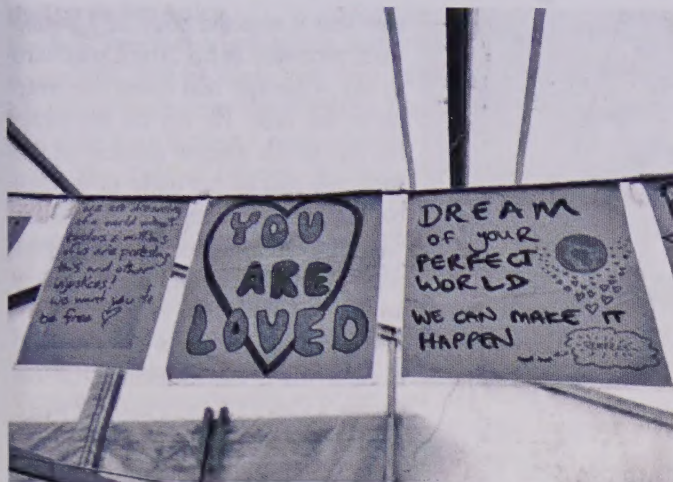
We had volunteers that stayed in the kitchens or the sorting and distribution centre for the duration of the trip, others got involved at the women's centre, the other kitchens at the camp, or at the Nurse's station or in the case of my Dad; a transport service between the hostel, warehouse and camp. He says meeting all the young people from all over Europe was very inspiring. People wanting to help out and get involved, people for whom waiting for their government wasn't an option.

We made contact again with the two projects close to our heart from the last trip; The Ashram Kitchen and the Good Chance Theatre. We had a lot of instruments from drums to guitars and more to deliver and when we did we were invited back for an evening of drumming. We drove right on to camp that evening with a 4x4 full (probably fuller than would be advised but we were off-road!) and had a short evening of Afghan drumming and dancing. We were asked to join in (then dragged to join in) and it was very invigorating and the release of emotions was tangible. It helped me see why creating a sense of ongoing community here is so important and having a small indoor space to share cultural and musical aspects from home is vital.

Almost all the young men there (on that particular evening) were from Afghanistan. Some had lived in the UK before and were hoping to be allowed back in to see family and friends. The majority of those at Calais are there for those reasons, they have fled to places where they have family connections or have

(Continued on next page)

'No act of kindness is ever wasted'



Messages of support at the Good Chance Theatre.

(Continued from previous page)

been before. I was witness to a volunteer and a refugee finding out they have both lived in the same road in Camden. Another moment I was thankful for was seeing our youngest volunteer, Tamsin come to the realisation during the drumming that she could volunteer anywhere in the world after this and feel safe and among friends. Apart from the common-sense needed when travelling and volunteering among difficult situations it was also important to see that humans are humans wherever in the world. There are always ties of friendship to be made across language and cultural borders.

Tamsin and her mother Rebecca volunteered at the women's shelter and their experience deeply moved them. The language of children is play and so through spending time there they were able to communicate and help forge memories of kindness and friendship where they haven't found it from the countries they had fled to.

The Ashram Kitchen was in dire straits and struggling to keep a working kitchen going with little food and few ways of keeping things hygienic. While we were there, another volunteer Julie had money come through to her crowd-funding campaign and we were able to spend the €300 to directly help the Ashram Kitchen.

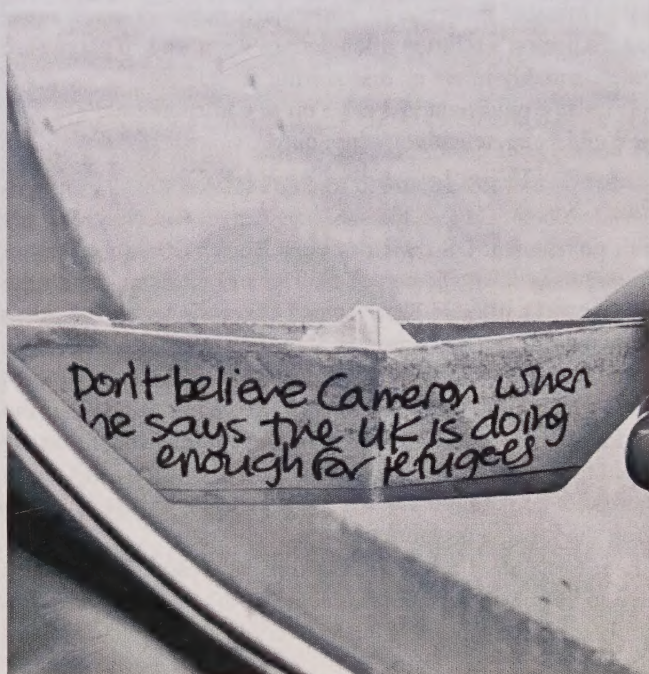
Places like the theatre and the kitchen become temporary emergency centres when people are evicted from their tents and shelters, and although the authorities have promised not to take down communal projects like the kitchen, and theatre there is a lot of uncertainty after the demolition of the church (I'm heartbroken about this) and so many of the wooden built shelters and tents.

We met up with Lori Winters and her daughter Lili on the Saturday bringing provisions from Lewisham Unitarian Church, it was great to connect and one of the many positive things brought about from the last article published in *The Inquirer*.

The morale at the Warehouse was very high energy and the hard work was carried out with endless cheerfulness. The volunteers (from around the world) had infectious smiles and a sense of fun that helped build a spiral of good feeling which rippled outwards. On more than one occasion volunteers from our group wondered whether they were supposed to be having such a good time. I think adrenalin had a lot to do with it and sharing the experience with others and having a sense of achievement and being of real practical use. After returning

'While we were so busy, unexpectedly joyous adrenalin sustained us but I don't think I was alone in finding the first weeks back home so sad. It turned much colder and we knew now what that would be like for the families and young men in the camp. And then came the winds – but also the chilly media storm and negative swell from so many which can threaten to overwhelm flickering optimism.'

– Lucy Hornby



home many of us experienced quite a 'crash' of emotion and exhaustion. And, we are ready to go back!

We are planning a trip for the end of April and a very large fundraiser at the Chapel in Bridport. We will be taking over all the emergency items requested by the warehouse (notably blankets, bed rolls and fire extinguishers). Some of our group have already been back and we have sent another carload with a local volunteer just yesterday. The news of the situation becomes out of date daily, and we can only carry on doing what we can, showing solidarity and kindness. Every town in the UK is doing something, it has become a grass-roots project of massive proportions. The ripple that just one person creates when getting involved can never be discounted.

No act of kindness is never wasted.

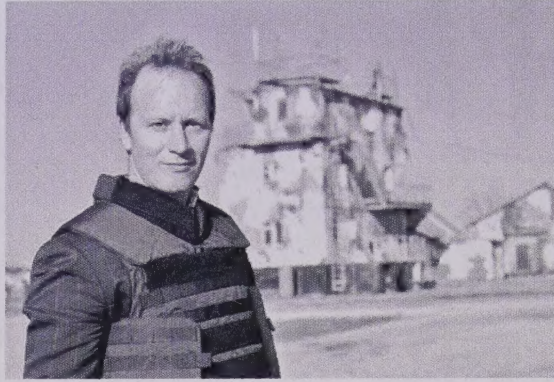
If you would like to be involved in anyway please contact me, you can keep up to date (nationally) with what is needed and how to donate via www.calaid.com and via our facebook page: www.facebook.com/bridportunitarians

Elizabeth Hornby is a member of Bridport Unitarians.
Reach her via email: events@bridportunitarians.co.uk

Unitarians are a mystery in the Sahara

By Paul Kenyon

It is possible that I have explained Unitarian values, or at least my pidgin version of them, to more people in more bizarre circumstances than anyone else in recent times. There was a group of Colonel Gaddafi's men patrolling the Sahara Desert, an Indian driver taking me across the plains of Rajasthan, several groups of migrants making their way across sub-Saharan Africa, and – the most difficult audience of all – a bar full of journalists in East Ukraine.



Paul Kenyon in the field

I work as a correspondent for BBC Panorama and have spent the last 20 years travelling and reporting, often on various forms of human misery. It's not that I go around searching for people who might want to listen to my views on faith; it's just that in many of these places, particularly in life-or-death situations, a person's religion often defines them, and so people are understandably intent on discovering mine.

'You're from England, yes? You're Christian, yes?'

'Well,' I say, tentatively, 'not quite'.

Was Jesus the son of God?

And so begins a question-and-answer session which begins with puzzlement ('So what is your Book? Do you celebrate Easter? Was Jesus the son of God?') and often ends with the statement 'That's me! That's what I believe in too. I just didn't know there was a name for it.'

I tell them that in the chapel of my childhood we had sermons which quoted the Qur'an and allowed us to consider the merits of Buddhism, Hinduism, and even atheism. 'I was allowed to choose what was right for me', I say. 'It wasn't about learning a book and believing every word. It took a bit more effort than that, a bit more thought.'

I am fortunate, I have realised in recent years, that I did not have to search for my faith: it came to me. I was born into a family of Unitarians and attended Bury Unitarian Church from an early age. I have Catholic friends who are mesmerised by the idea that I was not *forced* to believe in anything at all, that I could choose. It's the freedom that appeals to them, the freedom to question and criticise and challenge. They, like others, find the idea liberating.

But there is one set of people that I have spent time with whose predicament makes me more aware of my faith than most. These are people who have lost everything and belong nowhere, people who are persecuted and abused until the light within them has almost gone. I am talking about migrants escaping from conflict or, more often, fleeing chronically poor and chaotic lives which offer little hope of change. For the BBC, I spent a year following some of them along the world's most dangerous migration route, out of sub-Saharan Africa, across thousands of miles of desert, and then across the Mediterranean Sea towards Europe. There are no statistics for how many die on that route, but the estimate from aid agencies is around one in four.

When we came over the top of the dune, we saw our first body. It was lying behind a low grey rock, with a wrap of dried cloth curled around its head. I crouched down beside it and

saw that it was the body of a young man, probably in his 20s; it was hard to say – the sun had fused the wrap on to his face. He lay on his back, his feet in the narrow shadow of the rock, the rest of his body in the full blaze of the Saharan sun. His hands were thrown to either side. In one of them he held an empty plastic water bottle.

We had set off a few days earlier, from a town called Effiakuma on Ghana's Cape Coast. I had sat there in the town's white clay mosque,

listening to the Imam tell the young men: 'Those who take this route, we call them heroes.' The fittest, he said, the cream of the community, should try to get to Europe, so they could send money home to support the rest of the village. 'It's like a war', he said. 'We are fighting poverty and illiteracy and poor health.'

No prayers for the dead

So days later, when I crouched beside that dead body, I had some idea of how the young man had ended up on a Libyan sand dune, thousands of miles from home, and another thousand or so from where he wanted to be. Standing beside me was a Libyan border patrol guard, cradling an old hunting rifle, and signalling that it was time to go.

'You want to say a prayer for him?' I asked. The guard screwed up his face, shook his head, and began to climb back up the dune.

'He's not one of us', he shouted back.

'What do you mean? Not Libyan?'

'No, not Muslim.'

'How do you know?' I shouted back. 'Most of these guys are Muslim, and anyway why would it matter?'

'If he's not Muslim, I wouldn't pray for him', he said, and then disappeared over the crest of the dune. ...

I stood beside the body and said something quietly about hoping his suffering had come to an end, and that his family would be able to find strength. It was somewhere between prayer and reflection. I suspect that my cameraman thought the sun had got to me.

The guard's intolerance of outsiders was based on a familiar theme: that of protecting what belongs to us, to our families, to our communities. Migrants *take* jobs, they *take* living space, they *take* medical care, they *take* our social-security benefits, they *take* the purity from our religious doctrine. And the more migrants there are, the more taking there is. And the more taking there is, the less remains for the rest of us. That, as far as I can see, seems to be the nub of it.

Slough – a hotspot

That evening, around a campfire in the desert, I explained that my experience taught me differently: that migrants try to find work, to contribute to society, that they have made sacrifices on the journey which tell us much about what they have left behind, and that, in the end, the added diversity can only enrich our lives. I am not sure that this was a result of my Unitarian faith. It is impossible to disentangle that from the liberal values that my parents encouraged more generally. But

(Continued on next page)

Lindsey Press launches two new books

By Derek McAuley

Lindsey Press, the publishing arm of the Unitarian General Assembly, will be launching two new books at the Annual Meetings. Both draw upon writers from within the movement and offer very different perspectives.

On The Side of Liberty: A Unitarian Historical Miscellany by Alan Ruston will enable us to look at the past to draw lessons for the future. Alan has been researching the history of British Unitarianism, and writing about it in his typically trenchant style, for nearly 50 years. For this volume he has selected a range of articles from his published output, to present some of the individuals who have shaped the development of British Unitarian thought over the past 300 years.

From the famous to the almost forgotten, the singular individuals encountered in the book all upheld religious or political liberty, sometimes at great cost to themselves. The author considers them in their particular historical contexts and brings them to life with distinctive extracts from their own writings.

An active Unitarian and former president of the General Assembly, Alan Ruston has held many posts within the movement, most notably as the chair of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, and president of the Unitarian Historical Society. He, of course, is a frequent contributor to *The Inquirer*.

Living With Integrity: Unitarian values and beliefs in practice, gives fresh insight into the ways in which today's Unitarians put their own particular spiritual influences and core values into practice in everyday life. It is edited by the Rev Kate Whyman, minister of Plymouth Unitarian Church and Pound Square Unitarian Chapel, Cullompton.

How does a liberal and creedless faith inform the way its members live their lives? And what coherence, if any, might there be in their approaches to such diverse dilemmas as how

to live sustainably, how to work for justice, and how to die well?

The book – written in 12 specially commissioned chapters by Unitarians from many walks of life, including both ministers and lay people – offers a wide-ranging snapshot of current Unitarian faith in practice. Between them the authors address aspects of personal and home life – such as navigating sex and relationships, bringing up children, and coping with loss and dying; ways of engaging with the wider world – for example, at the workplace, in the political arena and on the campaign trail; and responses to urgent global concerns, such as migration and the environment.

Questions and suggestions for further reading are included at the end of each chapter to stimulate reflection and discussion, making this book ideal not only for the individual reader but also for group study.

Despite the diversity of spiritual influences and lifestyles represented in the book Kate concludes that it nevertheless manages to “encapsulate a very Unitarian way of approaching life, in all its complexity and extraordinary mystery [as] a way of profound thoughtfulness, questing intelligence and passionate determination”.

On the Side of Liberty is priced at £9.50 and *Living With Integrity* at £8.50 and will be available from the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, 1–6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY (tel. 0207 240 2384) or via major online booksellers.

An excerpt from *Living With Integrity*, by Paul Kenyon, appears on left. An excerpt from *On the Side of Liberty* will be published in the next issue of *The Inquirer*.

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

Fear of the 'other' drives migration debate

(Continued from previous page)

the guard who had refused to pray was there, and I know that my words set them all thinking.

Some time later, the British tabloids turned their firepower on the new migration menace: East Europeans. In the Berkshire town of Slough, I went searching for Romanians and Bulgarians ‘flocking’ to the area as EU work restrictions were lifted. The manager of a local hardware shop pointed to a double-page spread in his red-top newspaper.

‘This is where they’re all coming’, he said. ‘Look, it says Slough is a hotspot!’ And then: ‘I’m telling you there’s going to be trouble in these streets.’

‘Who is it, in particular, you don’t like?’ I asked. He paused for a moment. ‘It’s just the Romanians, to be honest with you.’

‘Why the Romanians?’ I asked. He struggled for a while and then said, ‘They’re just not the same as us.’

‘And what about you?’ I asked. ‘Your family ...’ It felt uncomfortable to point out the obvious. ‘Where are you from, Pakistan?’

‘Yes’, he nodded, without acknowledging any irony. ‘My father came here from Pakistan, but when our people came here, they came to work hard, they adapted, they made money, and now we are as good as anyone else.’

Here he was, an outsider who had become an insider, and was now adopting insider hostility against the new outsiders.

...I tried to explain, gently, that one day the Romanian migrants might feel the same way as him, when the next ‘wave of migrants’ hits our shores. I tried to suggest that perhaps it was not really the Romanians he was concerned about, but just any outsiders trying to better themselves; that their nationality was irrelevant. ...

The more recent migration crisis, with record numbers of refugees arriving in Europe from Syria, Afghanistan, and Eritrea, has given a new dimension to negative notions of ‘the other’. In the spring of 2015, when it was clear that this was a movement of people like no other since World War II, there was the familiar response: suspicion, hostility, a call to reject the migrants and protect our country, our culture, our economy.

But then a photograph appeared which quickly changed the national mood. It showed the lifeless body of a baby washed up on a Turkish beach – a human being so blameless, so vulnerable, and also so familiar. He looked like any other baby, in a pair of tiny shoes with a little red t-shirt, face down on the beach as though he were sleeping. And he had a name. Aylan. Now millions could identify with the father and his loss. Aylan looked like their child, any child. He had moved the perception of migrants from ‘the other’ to ‘one of us’.

An excerpt from *Living With Integrity: Unitarian values and beliefs in practice*.

News in brief

Sufi leader praises Padiham Unitarians

A visit by a worldwide Sufi leader, Shaykh Mehmet Adil, to Padiham Unitarian Chapel in Lancashire on 11 March, attracted a crowd of 250 people of different faiths, but overwhelmingly Sufi Muslim.

In his talk, Shaykh Mehmet paid tribute to the Unitarian community in Padiham for its role in promoting inter-faith understanding. He said the growing relationship between the Chapel and local Sufis of the Free Spiritual Centre in Nelson, was an example of how trust and unity could be built between faiths.

Chapel President Tony Cann and the Rev Jim Corrigan gave introductory addresses, and there was Sufi chanting at several points during the evening. Afterwards, nearly 200 people enjoyed a shared meal in the Chapel hall, with the food prepared and served by young men of the Free Spiritual Centre.

Shaykh Mehmet Adil is based in Turkey, and was on a brief UK tour. He is head of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi order, which has millions of followers worldwide, and which traces its lineage back to the great 13th century Sufi mystic and poet Jalaludin Rumi.

Shaykh Mehmet is the eldest son of the late Shaykh Muhammed Nazim Adil (leader of the Order until his death two years ago), who visited the Padiham Unitarian Chapel on a historic visit in 1995, when the Rev Andrew Rowley was minister.

— Jim Corrigan



The Rev Jim Corrigan (left) welcomes Shaykh Mehmet Adil to Padiham Unitarian Chapel. Photo provided by the Free Spiritual Centre.

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York Unitarian Andrew Parkinson speaks from the pulpit which was draped with rainbow flags to honour LGBT history month. Photo by Margaret Hill

York Unitarians celebrate several occasions

York Unitarians were invited to participate in February's York LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) History Month in February. The theme for the month was *religion, belief and philosophy*, and the organisers understood that Unitarians had been something of a leading light for including LGBT people within faith communities, and enquired if we were considering any event that could be included in their programme for LGBT History month. The York Unitarian Chapel had been the first church in York to be registered for the celebration of same-sex marriages, so the committee were keen to participate. This led to an invitation to Andrew Parkinson, a member of the York and Scarborough congregations and worship leader at Scarborough, to conduct a service on the theme of 'Pride', and this took place on Sunday, 21 February.

Andrew outlined the growing acceptance of LGBT people in the community at large, his own personal involvement in that welcome development and the role that British Unitarian congregations and places of worship are playing. For part of the service Andrew draped multi-coloured LGBT flags around the Chapel pulpit.

Visitors shared in the after service social time and left encouraging comments in the Chapel visitors' book.

In January the York Chapel had participated in York Residents' Festival, when the Chapel was open to the public all day on Saturday and Sunday afternoon with an exhibition about 'The Unitarian Path' with 210 visitors. The General Assembly President Rev. John Clifford conducted the morning service.

On 13 March, during International Women's Week, Unitarian historian Andrew Hill gave a talk about Catharine Cappe, the pioneering York feminist, who was not content that women were excluded from public life and decision making. She involved herself in matters of education, health and welfare in York previously dominated by men. She was also an enthusiastic Unitarian who worshipped in the Chapel, is buried somewhere in the Chapel yard and is memorialised inside.

— Margaret Hill

Who is the grumpiest of them all?

I'm feeling a little worried about Bill Bryson. I've thoroughly enjoyed his writing and was pleased to learn that my 13-year-old grandson has even studied some of his work at school. Bryson is an avowed and highly energetic anglophile, and I delighted in, and felt somehow flattered by, his *Notes from a Small Island*. I liked his short but helpful book *Shakespeare*, though I thought it was a bit cheeky when he produced his *Dictionary for Writers and Editors*, pronouncing in a confident and balanced way about 'greengrocers' apostrophes' and all that. Who was this American to tell us how to make best use of the English language? But, truth to tell, I have made occasional use of his books. He has served, among other things, as President of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, making a particular issue of the infuriating problem of litter, everywhere. A big tick for that.

So, what is worrying me? It started when I was given his latest book as a Christmas gift. It is a sequel to *Notes from a Small Island*, but I think the title is silly: *The Road to Little Dribbling*. However, I persevered, and mostly enjoyed it. It's a travel book, and, as with most of these, becomes particularly enjoyable when he visits places one already knows and can recognise. I delighted in his wanderings around Buxton in Derbyshire, a town to which I often make an excursion when staying at the Nightingale Centre in nearby Great Hucklow: *I had a walk around the town then browsed in shop windows for want of anything else to do. I particularly liked Potter's nice old men's outfitters that has been in Buxton since 1860 and looks to be still going strong, which these days seems not so much an achievement as a miracle. I was greatly taken with some shirts they had for sale, entirely because of the name: Seidensticker Splendestos. I know I am on record as saying that I don't need another thing, but who could resist that name? I am prepared to wear a shirt sight unseen if it is called a Splendesto. It's so good a name it ought to be a word in its own right, denoting a higher level of excellence beyond the splendid.*

I entirely agree. I know this shop and have purchased things there. So, what is troubling me? It was the use of the giveaway words 'these days'. Yes, I know things change, and not always for the better, but the implication is that things are going from bad to worse, and this alas tells me that Bryson is becoming a grumpy old man. Sure enough, he finds plenty to moan about, including the aforementioned apostrophes and litter. Then again, there are some aspects of our British way of life that he rejoices in and celebrates, most generously.

But there is more. Unlike his previous books, Bryson has taken to using coarse language. Really coarse, and I was shocked. And though I know all such words (and probably, so does my grandson) I am careful as to where and when I use them. I have never used a swear word in a sermon, not even for fun, nor yet in the *Inquirer*, except when I once used a somewhat vulgar expression. Even then I was quoting someone else, and half-concealed it with the use of an asterisk. Bryson, in this latest book, blasts his readers with eyebrow-raising expressions that I won't even quote by way



Funny Old World

By John Midgley

of illustration. Don't let it put you off the book, just take this as a sort of health warning.

Or perhaps I am the one becoming a grumpy old man. Somewhat safer and every bit as enjoyable has been another Christmas gift, *Bill Oddie Unplucked*. The former 'Goodies' comedian has a longstanding career as a nature and wildlife writer and broadcaster. This is a collection of his pieces, bright, readable, entertaining and informative. I was particularly challenged by his piece on animal behaviour that contrasts with the sentimental 'Aaahh' stuff that appears in abundance on Facebook:

Most of what wildlife programme-makers call 'animal behaviour', in a human context would be called 'misbehaviour'. Such content in a drama is preceded by a warning (Or is it a promise?) 'The following programme contains scenes of a sexual nature, violence and bad language from the start.' The same ingredients in a wildlife programme are just what the audience expects to see, and certainly what the production team likes working on. A wildlife cameraman would kill for a kill.

The BBC gets complaints when animal sex and violence are shown, particularly tricky to edit out when wildlife programmes are live. It is a dilemma that would make a good discussion topic for animal lovers, as well as those who dislike censorship.

Pondering further, I may have solved the puzzle about Bill Bryson's apparent change of style, or even character. He may have taken a leaf out of Alan Bennett's book. Bennett has for some time made it clear that he dislikes the idea of becoming a sort of national treasure. His plays and books are delightful to watch and read, and he has an enormous following. But he does not want to be thought of as a lovable, literary, Yorkshire teddy bear. So, every now and then he slips into his writing something shocking, in both language and content, to keep readers on their toes and over-adoring fans at something of a distance. I suspect that Bill Bryson has adopted a similar strategy, probably for the same reason. He does not want to become just a jolly, American entertainer, so nowadays lets rip with expletives. Who are the winners and losers in this is something I haven't figured out yet, but it is something I am not inclined to go in for myself. Not that I am angling to become a denominational treasure, but *The Inquirer* is a family newspaper, suitable even for our grandchildren.

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Welcoming migrants isn't the only answer

Compassion or confusion?

Good people advocate compassion, and practice it. But we now have a crisis of mass migration where that principle is challenged, not so much by bad or callous people as by circumstances. Compassionate people say (or more often, imply) that that we in Britain, or in Europe, should welcome all-comers, however many. A taboo, a shame, forbids us to discuss cold, hard numbers, maximum population density, or to take seriously the possible fragility of complex social structures.

We are told that migrants 'are human', just like us, and what normal, fully conscious human being could disagree with that? People also observe, quite often, that our own ancestors were immigrants way back in history, which is true but irrelevant since historical circumstances can hugely differ; and, as we should all be fully aware, the world population has never been as massive as it is now.

So what is the right principle to apply, and should it be consistent with reason? Must we maintain that *all* people from the chaotic, warring states, having exhibited huge courage in crossing hostile landscapes and dangerous seas, must be absorbed into societies which are peaceful, workable and relatively law-abiding? This is the ideal, but an archaic common sense pops up to observe that you cannot put a gallon into a pint pot.

There is also much confusion and emotive gesturing about resources. Councils are berated for not producing enough money to house an unpredictable but steadily rising number of migrants. And we are told that we are 'a rich society'. The increasing number of homeless people on our streets would find this hard to believe. Money is only one kind of resource. Space and nature are more fundamental. Would life be worth living if all the green spaces in our islands were to disappear



Refugees' tents among the trees in Calais in June. Photo by Michal Bělka, via Wikimedia Commons

under an unlimited number of houses, schools, hospitals, betting shops etc. etc.?

Our current moral dilemma is excruciating. I have only three flimsy but heartfelt suggestions. One: find new, ingenious, intelligent ways to deal with the violent psychopaths who dominate so many societies. Two: invest huge amounts of money in the camps currently housing refugees giving them decent conditions until it is possible for them to return home and build peaceful and prosperous societies of their own. Three: Change the economic system of the world so that the poor countries of the world have more power and a fairer share of the world's limited resources.

Christine Avery is a member of Plymouth Unitarians.

A lot's happening at *The Inquirer's* GA slot

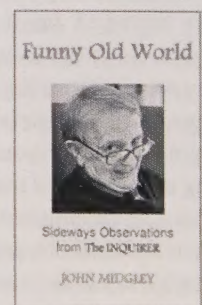
'Articles of Faith: Is there a future for journalism and religion?'

For 27 years, Ruth Gledhill was Religious Affairs Correspondent for The Times, where she did many hundreds of news articles, interviews, features and comment columns. She took redundancy two years ago to improve her quality of life. She now works part-time for Christian Today, a news website, and is studying for a Masters in Digital Journalism at Goldsmiths. She also contributes regularly to radio and television.



And: 'Funny Old World' -- the book!

John Midgley has written a regular column for The Inquirer for more than four years. This volume contains a selection of his observations. Though written initially for fellow Unitarians the events described and the observations on them have a wider interest. The topics chosen are generally serious, sometimes troubling, but often funny, in both senses of the word.



**Join us: 1.45pm on Friday, 1 April
(There will also be wine.)**

The International Association for Religious Freedom and The World Congress of Faiths present

PEAK EXPERIENCES AND PEACE

10am-4pm, Saturday, 16 April

Croydon Unitarian Church

1 Croydon Flyover CRO 1ER

We honour the 100th Birthday of **Wilfred Cantwell Smith** (1916-2000)

Director of Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions, author of *Faith And Belief*

We Honour **Abraham Harold Maslow** (1908-1970) who poetically observed in *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*: 'The great lesson from the true mystics (is that) the sacred is in the ordinary, that it is to be found in one's daily life, in one's neighbours, friends, and family, in one's backyard.'

Programme

10-10:30am Registration – coffee, tea

10:30-11am **Worship** featuring 'The Kol Nidre' by Andrew Wickens and Elizabeth Hills.

11am **Panel: 'My Life Journey, Peaks, Valleys and Peace':** 'Though I walk thru the valley ...'

Chair: Rev. Ashley Hills – Participants: Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke, President, World Congress of Faiths

Pejman Khojasteh, Secretary, British IARF; Arman Mohajeri, Bahai

Vegetarian lunch provided

1pm 'The Lark Ascending', violin and piano by Andrew Wickens and Elizabeth Hills, honouring Rev.

Orlanda Brugnola, IARF Representative to the UN (died, February 2016)

1:15-2:30pm **Panel: 'Three Cardinal Virtues'**

Trust: Ian Mason, president, School of Economic Science (SES)

Compassion: Rev. Chris Hudson, MBE All Souls Church, Belfast

Hope: Rev. Dr Richard Boeke, IARF Peace Comm.

2:30-3:15pm Circle Group Discussion

3:15-3:30pm Report back from Circle Groups, Closing Words, Silence, and Benediction

3:30-4pm Brief meeting of the IARF Peace Commission.

I am driven by a quest for wholeness. I subscribe to an ecotheology which sees me as part of one vast ongoing Whole, pictured also in the great metaphor ... of the Tree of Life. I am fortunate in the people I find at hand who are on the same way.

– Rev. Phillip Hewett at the end of the Odyssey he gave to Unitarian Ministers at Greece
Hucklow, Sept 201

The strange thing is in helping others we end up helping ourselves. Being true to one another we are finally true to ourselves.

– Rev Orlanda Brugnola

Croydon Unitarian Church is next to the Friends Meeting House, a 10-minute walk from East Croydon Station

Please email: r.boeke@virgin.net to secure a place. A £5 donation at the door is requested.

FREE entrance with £15 membership to British Chapter IARF or £25 to World Congress of Faiths.

Send a cheque to 'British Chapter IARF' or 'World Congress of Faiths' with postal and email address to:

Mehrdad Kalani, 24 Woodland Way, Roffey, Horsham RH13 6AQ.

News in brief

2016 Channing Lecture is set

This year's Channing Lecture, *The International Vision of British Unitarians*, is planned for 7pm on Saturday, 23 April at Golders Green Unitarians, Hoop Lane, and will be delivered by Derek McAuley, Chief Officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

British Unitarians have always had an international vision. Derek will describe how this global perspective has changed over time and explore how it continues to have relevance today and for the future.

Tickets, available on the door, will be £10 and part of the proceeds will go to the Clara Barton Red Cross Syria Crisis Appeal. The church is at 31 Hoop Lane, NW11 8BS – five minutes' walk from Golders Green Underground Station (Northern Line, Edgware Branch). For more information please contact the Rev Feargus O'Connor (ggunirev@aol.com or 020 7837 4472).



Derek McAuley



St Mark's church and General Assembly Executive Committee member Joan Cook, and her husband Stan, were given a warm welcome, and treated as 'Honoured Guests' when they visited Chennai Unitarians last month. Joan was able to deliver greetings from the Scottish Unitarians and the General Assembly. St Mark's Church in Edinburgh has a long standing partnership with the Chennai Unitarian Church, the oldest Unitarian Church in India.

As the visit took place during the school exam period, less than half the children were at church that week, they were down to 24! Joan, wearing flowers, is shown with the Rev Harrison Kingsley, his wife, and his mother, Mrs Gabriel, probably the longest serving Church secretary, with over 50 years of service!

Photo provided by Joan Cook

Ministry Inquiry Day



Would you like to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian Minister and about working with our congregations?

This summer the Ministry Strategy Group will be holding an Inquiry Day for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training. There'll be chance to meet our tutors and recent graduates.

Venue: Leicester Great Meeting House, LE1 4SX

Date: Friday 29th July 2016

Time: 11am for 11.30 start – 3.30pm finish

Booking deadline: 22nd July

Advance booking is essential.

For more information and to book, please contact:

Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly,
Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384 / Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

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For an informal chat, ring Susan Holt,
Chairman of Trustees on 07876 716 563